

Iván ARGOTE

HighSnobiety,
Taking Down Statues in Paris with Iván Argote

June 2021

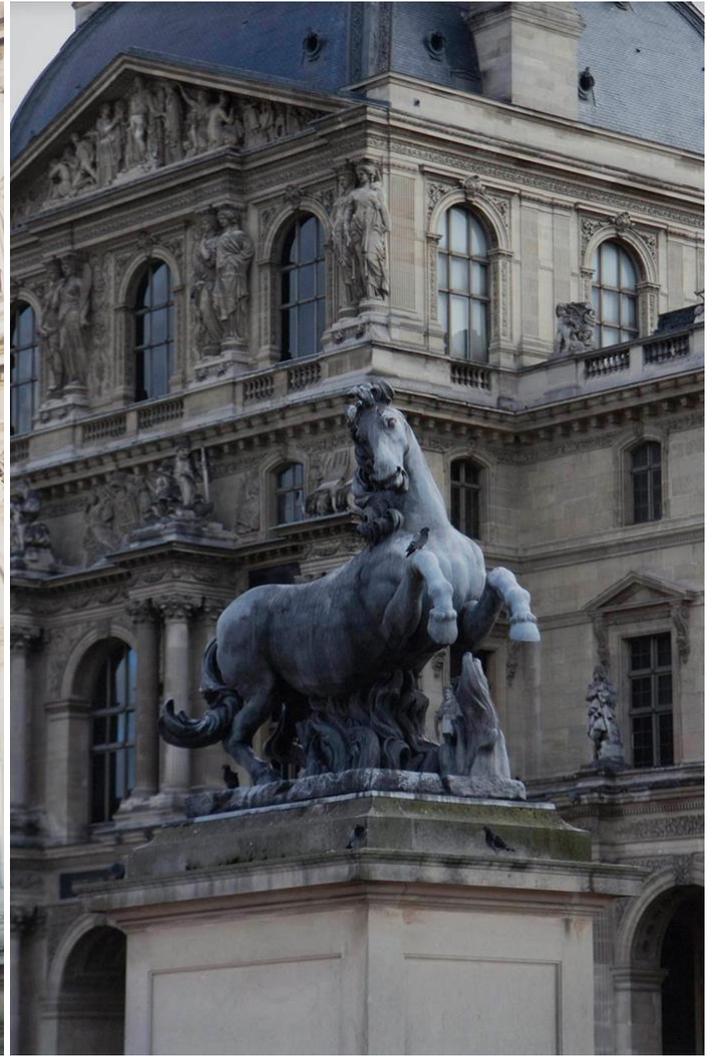


Curated by Highsnobiety and presented during the time period formerly known as Paris Men's Fashion Week, Not In Paris 3 is our third in a series of bi-annual digital exhibitions celebrating creativity in the age of remote interactions. [Head here](#) for the full series and cop our new merch via our [online store](#).

Statues have long been siphons for discontent, whether they're being covered in graffiti, shit on by pigeons, or getting toppled and destroyed by protestors. The Colombian artist Iván Argote plays on this statue-disdain in his new show "A Place For Us," opening at Perrotin New York on June 17.



Horse (Paris, Louvre), 2011
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN



Horse (Paris, Hôtel de Ville), 2011
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN

The show depicts monuments in various un-monumental iterations. *Wild Flowers* features a replica of the Washington statue on Wall Street that has been reproduced, only dissected into eleven pieces that are scattered throughout the gallery, some filled with soil and flowers. *Etcétera* is a series of marble plinths, topped by mirrors that reflect their surrounding context rather than a historical figure. More than just a room containing works, it seems that Argote wanted to use the gallery space to simulate a world where statues and what they represent had finally become obsolete.

IVÁN ARGOTE: The idea of a monument has to change. It's naive to believe that something is going to represent us forever. But I don't want to just remove these statues and replace them with other statues, because then you're still using the same rhetoric, the same narrative. So instead of centralizing the attention in these iconic things, let's make something that's more horizontal. That's why the exhibition is very horizontal in that there's pieces here and there. I wanted the show to be an environment. I wanted to decentralize these things.

Argote has been developing this fetish-like interest in statues for over a decade, going back to his short video work *Glup Glup (Monument)*, from 2009, which featured a bust of Simón Bolívar, half submerged in a fountain in Bogotá. In 2013, he went on a proverbial spree, also in Bogotá, covering a number of conquistador statues in a traditional indigenous poncho for the series *Turistas*.

PATRICK MCGRAW: How did you become interested in statues?

ARGOTE: I was always very conscious that these monuments and symbols are not natural. That they're constantly trying to tell us something, but we forget because we try not to see it when we pass them. But I always felt it was oppressive to see these symbols there. When I moved to Paris, it became more evident because of the greatness that Paris and big cities try to represent. I remember my first day in Paris, in 2006, when I went to the Louvre. I was impressed by the beauty of many things there, but shocked at the same time to see all these treasures in downtown Paris from different parts of the globe and civilizations. In Colombia, we don't even have pre-Columbian art. So this interest has been there since the beginning of my work.



GUILLAUME ZICARELLI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN

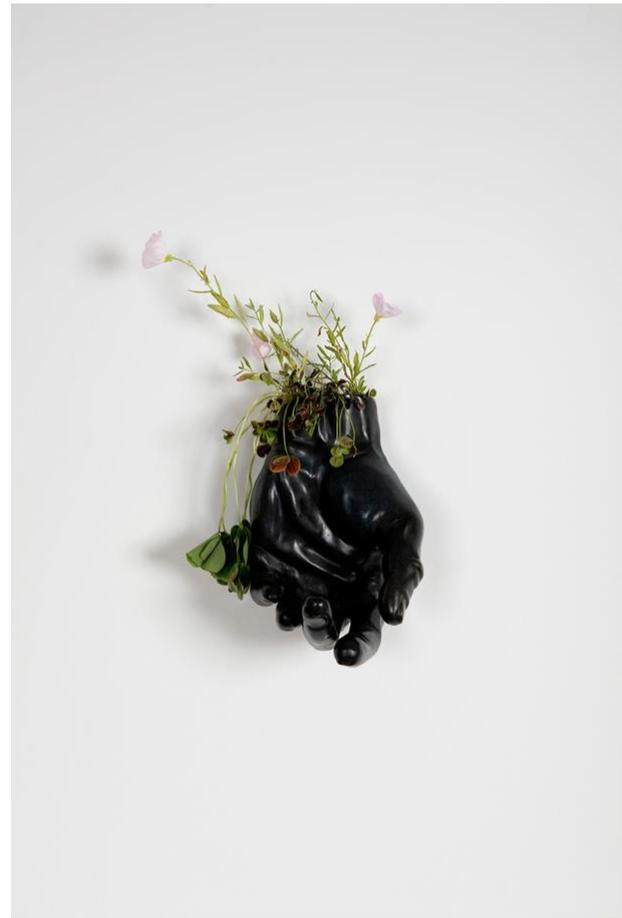


Installation View of Iván Argote: A Place For Us at Perrotin New York, 2021
GUILLAUME ZICARELLI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN



Wild Flowers: A Thumb, 2021

GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN



Wild Flowers: A Hand, 2021

MCGRAW: Don't you think that the majority of people (including myself) in the majority of any city don't know about the statues that surround them?

ARGOTE: We just get used to these things. Maybe we're too used to being oppressed in this way, of being shown images that are supposedly our history. People have lives to lead and they can't spend all their time focused on these things, so these monuments seem natural, but they really aren't. Why do I need to see these statues twice everyday, when I go out and come home? Just because we've lived for hundreds of years in this way isn't a good reason to keep them around.

“A Place For Us” is a prescient show considering the current political turmoil in Colombia that has seen widespread demonstrations, specifically by young people in Bogotá and Cali. The protests began as far back as the winter of 2019, but flared up again in April following a proposed tax reform, and were egged on by myriad stresses related to COVID. Some of the statues used in Argote’s work have been part of the protests these past months, and in a couple of instances in Cali, were literally destroyed.

MCGRAW: What role can art play in politics?

ARGOTE: Maybe not necessarily from the arts, but culture in general is a way we can explore new strategies and create new narratives and conversations. We can generate new ideas that aren’t violent or confrontational, but about new ways of communicating.



Left: Bondage: Sebastián de Belalcázar, Santiago de Cali, 2021



Right: Bondage: Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, Richmond, Virginia, 2021

GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN

MCGRAW: What do you think about the current unrest in Colombia?

ARGOTE: It concerns me a lot. Colombia is one of the most corrupt countries in the world and extremely unfair in terms of the wealth gap between the rich and the poor. The government there always creates a public enemy. It used to be the Guerrillas that the government would blame everything on. Since the peace treaty, they've created a new public enemy, the young people, who are protesting because they have worse opportunities and lives than their parents' generation. In Colombia, we're not as wealthy as other countries, but we did have some progress in terms of access to education and healthcare. But even that small amount of progress has stopped, and this new generation has no opportunities for employment or healthcare, and in a way, are poorer than their parents. And their parents were not even middle class, so they see a hopeless environment.

Technology, another medium with oppressive tendencies, plays a central role in his show at Perrotin. In *Au Revoir*, Argote created a deepfake to document the fictional toppling of the Gallieni statue at Place Vauban in Paris. By being able to dismantle statues at will, Argote's work shows the irrelevancy of such monumentality in the face of 21st century technology and an increasingly ad hoc cultural landscape. A statue of a French colonizer is toppled in a deepfake that bears a striking resemblance to the real thing, and to a person viewing the works on a computer or at a gallery in a distant country, who is already living a predominantly virtual life, what's the difference if the real thing still stands?

ARGOTE: I wanted to create a fiction that pictures the day these statues were removed. Not violently, but as a banal gesture, which it actually is. Nobody cares about it now, and it's horrible and oppressive, so why not remove it in a banal and boring way? So I created a deepfake of the statue, which was an interesting way of playing with that form which is very present today. It also shows that removing these states is possible.



Etcétera : en couvrant avec des miroirs Francisco de Orellana, le soi-disant découvreur de l'Amazonie. Parc national, Bogotá, 2012 - 2018
GUILLAUME ZICCARELLI. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PERROTIN

MCGRAW: Do you think that technology and specifically deepfakes can become oppressive themselves?

ARGOTE: They are. I'm playing a tricky game there too because the whole system is creating this information now and we're living more and more in

our own fictions that are generated by these systems. I guess it was always the same in a different way because our lives have always been run by a fiction. Religion used to be the main one, and previously people were more influenced by whatever the church or their religion said about following a system of beliefs. Now it's more chaotic but we all try to find a fiction to push us. But that's also why we need to use these tools in another way. Oftentimes now they're used to generate more hate. I think it's a creative tool that needs to be included in a fictional way to generate other content and narratives too. Through fiction we can generate new ideas for reality.

There's something to be said about an artist making work about their country in a state of hopelessness, and trying to communicate even a portion of that sentiment. In the US, it's easy to feel disenchanted about how poorly art represents the urgency many people feel, no matter what ideologies one subscribes to. Though in the past few years Argote's work has found echoes in America, namely in the Confederate statues being taken down throughout the South. Although the toppling of those statues gained nationwide attention during the recent Black Lives Matters protests, various groups that have been petitioning for their takedown for decades. For Argote, his connection to those movements goes beyond just their actions.

ARGOTE: It does seem like we're in a moment right now. It's good because it feels like we're all part of the same conversation. I'm part of that generation that's aware of these things. We're millions of people who are all feeling the same thing, and then at a certain point, it erupts. I just hope the show will be seen as contributing to the conversation.